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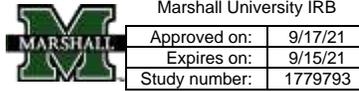
**Georgia Participant 1 (White/female/29), interviewed on March 7,
2022**

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Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

The Fake News and Information Literacy Project

Stephen M. Underhill, PhD, Principal Investigator



Key Information

You are invited to participate in a research study. Research studies are designed to gain scientific knowledge that may help other people in the future. You may or may not receive any benefit from being part of the study. Your participation is voluntary. Please take your time to make your decision, and ask your research investigator or research staff to explain any words or information that you do not understand. The following is a short summary to help you decide why you may or may not want to be a part of this study. Information that is more detailed is listed later on in this form.

The purpose of this study is to understand the Appalachian experience with fake news and how people determine what is/not credible online. We expect that you will be in this research study for one hour. Though you will be anonymous and your identity will be kept secret, a redacted copy of your interview transcript will be posted online on Marshall University's Digital Scholar website (https://mds.marshall.edu/oral_history/).

You will be asked 64 questions. Your dialogue will be recorded on Microsoft Teams and housed on Marshall University's OneDrive, which is password protected. The recording will be destroyed at the end of the semester (during finals week). To protect your privacy, you will be identified by your state of residence, race, sex, age and participant number. For example, the Digital Scholar website will catalogue your interview with a pseudonym like "Kentucky Participant 5 (White/Male/65), interviewed on October 5, 2021." Please avoid mentioning your name or other identifying information in the interview. Your name will not be on the transcript. The name of the interviewer will not be included in the transcript or otherwise on Marshall University's Digital Scholar website. All identifying information will be removed before transcripts are posted online. But once transcripts are posted on Marshall University's Digital Scholar website, they will be permanent. We will not be able to remove them.

How Many People Will Take Part In The Study?

About 24 people every semester people will take part in this study. A total of 24 subjects are the most that would be able to enter the study per semester.

What Is Involved In This Research Study?

You will be asked a series of 64 open-ended questions about your thoughts and feelings on fake news and disinformation online. You will be asked about your opinion of sensitive social questions like issues of race, class, religion, etc.

With your consent, this interview will be recorded. You will only be identified as "you" during the interview. The Microsoft Teams recording, which will be with the camera turned off, will be stored on Marshall University's OneDrive and will only be shared with the FYS small group, the FYS graduate assistant and the professor. These people will use the recording to verify consent and make a

Subject's Initials _____

redacted transcript. Definitized transcripts will be uploaded to Marshall University's Digital Scholar website (https://mds.marshall.edu/oral_history/).

What Are Your Rights As A Research Study Participant?

You may choose to not take part in the study. You may leave the study up to the point that the interview is complete. Once the redacted transcript is posted on the website a participant may not withdraw. Refusing to participate or leaving the study will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled. If you decide to stop participating in the study we encourage you to talk to the investigators or study staff first.

The study investigator may stop you from taking part in this study at any time if he/she believes it is in your best interest; if you do not follow the study rules; or if the study is stopped.

Detailed Risks Of The Study

Because the recording will be destroyed at the end of the semester, and because the only a deidentified redacted transcript will be posted online, there is no foreseeable risk in the study.

What About Confidentiality?

We will do our best to make sure that your personal information is kept confidential. However, we cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. Federal law says we must keep your study records private. Nevertheless, under unforeseen and rare circumstances, we may be required by law to allow certain agencies to view your records. Those agencies would include the Marshall University IRB, Office of Research Integrity (ORI) and the federal Office of Human Research Protection (OHRP). This is to make sure that we are protecting your rights and your safety. If we publish the information we learn from this study, you will not be identified by name or in any other way.

What Are The Costs Of Taking Part In This Study?

There are no costs to you for taking part in this study. All the study costs, including any study tests, supplies and procedures related directly to the study, will be paid for by the study.

Will You Be Paid For Participating?

You will receive no payment or other compensation for taking part in this study.

Whom Do You Call If You Have Questions Or Problems?

For questions about the study or in the event of a research-related injury, contact the study investigator, Stephen Underhill at 304-696-3020 or at underhills@marshall.edu. You should also contact the investigator if you have a concern or complaint about the research.

Subject's Initials _____

For questions about your rights as a research participant, contact the Marshall University Office of Research Integrity (ORI) at (304) 696-4303. You may also call this number if:

- You have concerns or complaints about the research.
- The research staff cannot be reached.
- You want to talk to someone other than the research staff.

Did you receive a copy of the consent form?

Please say Yes or No

Do you agree to take part in this study and confirm that you are 18 years of age or older?

Please say Yes or No

Have you had a chance to ask questions about being in this study and have had those questions answered?

Please say Yes or No

What is today's date?

Subject's Initials _____

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The participant agreed to the terms of the consent.

Interviewer: Tell me about when you first started using social media and news started to appear for the first time on your feed.

Participant: Let's see, the technically first time I used social media would be I think was like 13. That's when like Xanga and Myspace were really big. And then the first time I really started noticing news was right before Barack Obama, the first Barack Obama election on Facebook.

Interviewer: OK.

Participant: Yeah, that was very interesting.

Interviewer: Alright, on a normal day, how do you use the Internet?

Participant: In typical day I need to check the weather so I can dress my son. Uh, trynna think, I typically don't check social media in the morning. Uh, I use it to check my email and do work. Uh, and then usually I'll check social media throughout the day, if I get bored.

Interviewer: OK, what did you search for online in the last week?

Participant: I can tell you this. Is CBD safe for cats? Real estate information for local stuff. I looked at information regarding the Ukraine crisis that's going on currently, and recipes. And Wordle. I do a lot of Wordle in the morning.

Interviewer: Alright, what websites do you visit to past time when you're bored? And then what do you do on those websites and why those sites in particular?

Participant: So, I typically do Instagram, because it's very visual and it has a lot of great, like parenting resources. And I'm ADHD, so having that, even if it's like a very serious story, having the picture makes my brain happy. And then I do Kindle a lot.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Participant: We talked about Wordle. And then occasionally I'll do Reddit. TikTok. I'm bad about doing TikTok.

Interviewer: Yep, getting lost down the TikTok rabbit hole is real.

Participant: Oh yeah, it's like it's become a love language with my partner and I.

Interviewer: Alright, thinking about these questions, what do you think other people are doing? Both people you know and people that you don't know. How do you think they spend their time online?

Participant: I think it depends on the person. It's been very interesting growing up with social media because of the different demographics. So even just like my sister is 5 years younger than I am and she uses the Internet and social media completely differently. And then like I have a friend that is five years above me and she uses it completely different than my sister or I do so. So, in my family were all pretty spread apart, so we use it to kind of keep in touch with each other. That's really the only reason I still use stuff like Facebook or Instagram really is so I can post pictures of my son for my family to see. I think for the younger generations it can be very performative, like what they put out is kind of performative. But what they seek is usually very validating. So, like we talked about with Tik TOK and Instagram and stuff, it's really nice people will be like oh my god, I'm not the only one who brushes their teeth in the shower and drinks or coffee in the shower. That's so nice to know. So.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

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Participant: I think it depends, but like you know, talking with older generations, they don't really ever use social media like that or even the Internet like that.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Participant: So yeah, I think what the younger generation tends to post out is, almost performative, and what they receive or look for is more validating and then the older generations it tends to be they look for more informative and they use it kind of at least like Facebook the older generations use it like Google or like a venting session.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Participant: Uh, I have to use Next-door because I'm in the HOA of my neighborhood and it is a train wreck on there, and people just use it like a soap box. It's very interesting to see all these old people out there just causing some drama.

Interviewer: Alright, uh, what types of devices do you use to access the Internet? For example, phones, tablets, laptops and what do you use the most and the least?

Participant: Uhm, I typically use my phone the most when it comes to like social media specifically, just because I really don't use like my work computer for that kind of stuff, I try to. I try to be a good employee but, I typically use my phone the most, and then I have no problem using a computer, but I don't really use my tablet anymore. That is something that I think the older generations use. A lot of people like my mom cannot be more than five feet away from her Kindle. Or not Kindle, but her iPad at any given time. I've seen like it's the Boomers and the toddlers that are very connected to their iPads.

Interviewer: Yes, I've noticed that too.

Participant: And I have some strong feelings about toddlers and, you know, iPads. But that's my background is in developmental education.

Interviewer: Got it. Makes perfect sense, yeah.

Participant: Yeah, I have some strong feelings about that.

Interviewer: Alright uh, what social media or forums like Twitter or Reddit do you use? When, why, or for what, do you use them? Are there any sites that you try to avoid or reasons that you avoid them? So if you don't go on a specific site, why wouldn't you go on that site?

Participant: Uh, I don't go on Twitter because it's just a lot of information and none of it really seems to have substance. And I found that the things that I would enjoy on Twitter tend to get reposted on other platforms of social media without me having to navigate Twitter, Instagram is good for catching up with friends, I guess I use it for like parenting and I have a lot of tattoos. I love tattoos so I use that to look for stuff like that, very visual stuff, local artists like, I'm looking for some art for my son's room right now and I'm using Instagram to look for those local artists.

Interviewer: Oh, that's cool.

Participant: And then Tik TOK. I use for just about everything because I do consider TikTok a form of social media. Like I said, it's validating in a lot of ways. It can be informative. It's allowed me to find other vendors and artists and that kind of stuff. That's been very cool. And then Facebook, I mostly just use it to put out information, usually for all of the older family. If I need to create an event, like for friends and family, or if I want to look for events. And then I use like you know for messaging and that kind of stuff. Trying to think if there's anything else, Reddit. I did Reddit for a long time and then I kind of stopped and I've only recently gotten back into it. It can just be a bit of a sinkhole because everything is posted anonymously. There are a

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lot of really great resources on Reddit. There are a lot of really shitty people on Reddit. So it's kind of hard to weed out those too, but I love that you could find a subreddit for just about everything, so it's really cool for you if you have like a really small niche that you want to be a part of. It's kind of hard to find some of that stuff on social media. Instagram is getting better about that. But like, trying to think if there's anything in particular, so previous to my current role, I was editing adult erotic fiction. Uh and Reddit, it was a really great resource for some of those niche things that I don't have personal experience with that I could go and do some research. So it's a good way to get anecdotal research about certain things, and get perspectives. And then there's also just the entertainment value of like, I'm a sucker for Am I The Asshole (AITA) posts.

Interviewer: I see. I've never really used Reddit before all that much. I didn't know that it was anonymous.

Participant: So yeah, like you make a username and like a lot of people will make throwaway accounts and stuff like that, because of that people are emboldened, which can be a good thing. Like, it can mean that people are able to post like, I come from a abusive relationship, so I'm on one of those subreddits and it's been really nice people be like, "hey, I can't post about this to my family or friends, but I need to get out," and like they're able to get resources. There's also the shitty side of being anonymous of, I'm trying to think of saying this in a nice way. I do have a bit of a potty mouth and I know that this is for like an academic thing, so I'm trying to be good.

Interviewer: You have the freedom to say whatever you want.

Participant: Assholes, just really shitty people who are trying to cause issues.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Participant: Uh, or they have very strong views that they know aren't socially acceptable, if they were able to put their face to it. So when it's anonymous, they can say whatever they want.

Interviewer: No, that makes perfect sense. Alright. The next question, when thinking about people you would likely disagree with, describe which forums or sites you think they are likely to use and why.

Participant: So Facebook is really bad about that. Because of the first and subsequent election I no longer talk to about half of my extended family. I was never super close with them to begin with. So on Facebook, it seems like they are looking for an echo chamber and the way that they do that is by putting their opinions out there and then they get validation for those opinions, even if they're completely wild, by likes, responses, etc. And then if they're shit stirrer, they put out those opinions knowing that they're going to be controversial and want to start that kind of argument-discussion type. And it's a very interesting way that opinions have now become the way of fact. It feels like the moment that they post something or share something, or find something even that agrees with them even if it makes zero sense, they're validated and therefore this is fact. And then Reddit, is really bad about that. Because of these subreddits, they create an echo chamber. So if you go to the anti-vax subreddit, everyone in there is most likely going to agree with you. And then you're going to get other ideas as well, and so it doesn't really create an opportunity for you to get for like a checks and balances of your ideas. Like if you just go on saying like, "I think that ducks are racist." If you find 1 subreddit, even if there's only like 4 people in it that agrees with you, that's going to be a kind of cement to your belief.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Participant: So it's very frustrating dealing with that kind of stuff on Reddit, which is part of why I left Facebook, which is why I don't really follow a lot of my family anymore. Like we're still friends, but I don't follow them because I really don't want to see their crap.

Interviewer: Yeah.

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Participant: It's very difficult to be active in being self-aware to, like, be actively aware of your beliefs and checking yourself. It's really nice to have that validation that an echo chamber provides. You don't need to look at like, when I was going through school, we were shown what credible websites look like, "this is how you know if a website has a bias" and that doesn't really seem to be a priority anymore, because what we're looking for is more based on validation than on fact.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Participant: Which has been very frustrating, which is another reason why I really don't use Facebook all that much is because any dickhole can post anything. It made for very entertaining quarantine because I was able to debate with my cousins about, you know, "no, we're not being microchipped."

Interviewer: Yeah.

Participant: He's like, "I'm not gonna get the vaccine because, you know, I don't want the government knowing where I am." I was like, "as you post from your smart phone that you use your GPS with or using social media, a driver's license, and you just complain the other day that you got a ticket from a light at an intersection, which means they know where you are already, friendo. You're also really boring. Like, if the government was going to track people. I don't think it's going to be some random person in the middle of Virginia."

Interviewer: Yeah, pretty much what you said about the emergence of entertainment media and news and factual information is pretty much what this entire class is about and how people, either the ways in which they analyze their news and determine its credibility, or if they don't do it, and you know the rise and misinformation and, you know, fake news and everything like that. That's what this entire interview is about, and it has been fascinating so far.

Participant: The 24-hour news cycle I think has been one of the worst things that can happen to encourage free thinking if that makes sense. Like it's so easy to sit back and be told opinions, and then have this evidence already presented for those opinions. Like if you like blank, you will feel blank, blank and blank.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Participant: I feel like that's a lot of, like, the Fox News. and that kind of stuff, and you know, I am a liberal, but even some of the liberal news sites, they're creating content to stay on air without content being necessary. I mean, I'm a little bit of an analog person anyway, but I kind of miss when news was just this time and this time. That's all. We don't need news all throughout the day. News isn't that exciting. And I feel like they just kind of create things to stay relevant, stay pertinent and it's just unnecessary in my opinion, and more harmful than anything.

Interviewer: Describe for me what you do when you want to find out something factual versus how do you think people around you find out if something is factual?

Participant: Uhm, so I'm a bit of a nerd, I was that kid in school who loved going to school and hated when they like lengthened summer vacation. And I have, you know, a background in humanities, and so my first thought is, "okay, I'm gonna find a scholarly resource." But if it's just something that I'm not really familiar with and I don't know the best place to find a resource, honestly, Wikipedia. It's pretty good because they have those citations at the bottom. And they're always linked and that kind of stuff. And so, you can kind of get a pretty good feel like, "yes, it's editable," but you can always go down and like, backtrack it and then from there I normally try and find like, if it's a serious thing I'll find like three sources that look to be from different types of information areas, and I'll try to compare them. And I always look at the links that are linked within, and half of the time, like my local news station, half of the links are to ads. Or to somewhat relevant things like they mentioned there like "yeah, and the new thing will be cars on

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the railway to, you know have more traffic" and it was an ad to the opening of the Railway Museum. Like those aren't connected. But it makes it look really good and so if you're just looking through and you don't check anything, it's really easy. Like "oh wow, they've all these links like obviously they've done their research."

Interviewer: Yeah

Participant: So yeah, and I know that I'm not the average person when it comes to seeking out information like that. So like my dad, my dad is a very unique man, but he originally had mentioned that oh yeah, I'm probably just going to vote for Trump again. And he raised two very strong daughters and a very feminist strong wife, and so almost like. "I'm sorry. What?" And he was like, "well, yeah, like, he's a businessman." And my sister, I immediately jumped in, like, "but they're all failed. Like, he has more bankruptcies than anything else." And he's like, "oh, man, I had no idea," and it just never occurred to him when he looked up what he wanted to see, he typed in an opinion basically. And then it was validated by the fact that there are results, and that's all he really needed to know in his mind. It was like he typed in an opinion, results came up regarding that opinion that validated where he stood, so he thought, therefore my opinion is correct and didn't really do any research, which is really frustrating. And then once we gave him some resources, he was like, "oh well, this is terrible, like, he would be a really awful leader." So I think it's people will seek to validate their own opinions now more than ever, and that's on both sides, because you want to feel good about what you feel like it's very reassuring to be like, "yes, I am smart enough that other people have the same ideas and opinions I do, which means I am right." I think it's hard to be self-aware enough to look beyond that unless you have that kind of background anyway.

Interviewer: Alright so, this is just one question, but I have a lot of branching off parts. So everyone comes across things that surprises them on social media, between advertising and news and commentary. Describe a time when you came across content that you doubted with trustworthy or made you distrust its author or its purpose.

Participant: Boo. OK. There's a lot of outlandish ones. Because my aunt did the whole like QAnon thing. But I'm gonna stick with one that I had to really step back and, like, do some research. And there was a thing about, like, a year or so ago and it was about they're trying to garner support for what they called like a foundation or a group that was supposed to be helping to fight child trafficking. If I remember correctly, I was like "this seems really good" and like it had this little infographic that seemed legit and it had citations at the bottom of the infographic and was like "this many people get, you know, trafficked. And this is what happens. And this group is trying to do something about it." I was like, "oh, that's really interesting." And then I looked at the comments. And I saw the kind of comments that were coming back and that kind of gave me pause. And so I just happened to Google this site, like, Support All Children or something like that, and then I put bias at the end of the search. And sure enough, it popped up, it's a QAnon branch off. And I would have had no idea because the main site looked really good.

Participant: However, when it comes to the bias issue, it is based on a very fundamentalist Christian group, and they have a lot of power. They have very strong opinions about all this kind of stuff, and so they include kids who have been trafficked, or kids who have been adopted by gay parents. Yeah, so it's like, "oh," but like, I originally shared it without thinking because I was like, "Wow, this is really important information." And I know, like, living in Georgia, where I am, there is a lot of traffic that happens here, so it's like a big deal on something that's on my mind. And then it was like, "you know what, though? Hold up." And so, I had, I like, I went back, and I edited, but I didn't like, delete it. I just kind of wrote a note on top. It was like, "I've done some more research. Here are some links that show what this page is about and why I'm not supporting it. Here are alternatives." And I still got push-back of course, because, you know, I must hate children if I question it.

Interviewer: Well, that's great. Then instead of just deleting the post, you provided more resources for, you know, people who will see the post. In a way, you're preventing more people from seeing it.

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Participant: That. That's my hope.

Interviewer: Yeah, it was from falling victim to that kind of false advertisement in a way.

Participant: And I am that family member who, like I know my aunt, posted something. She was like, "You know, all of our prices are going up and things were better under Trump, and they weren't." I don't argue, I just find. I go to PolitiFact, and I find the relevant article and I post it, and I send it for their consideration. It was cool because it's not worth fighting over people, but you must at least try and do a little bit of research.

Interviewer: Alright, branching off that question. Share a time when you talked to your friends or family about such content, which you just answered.

Participant: Yeah, it doesn't always go well. Like I said, I don't talk to about a good half of my extended family now just because I don't need that kind of thing. I'm not going to put in the kind of energy to convince them because they're not going to be convinced. They don't want to be open to it. So I'm not going to bother with that.

Interviewer: Tell me.

Participant: I have enough going on in my life. I don't need to bother with that. And I, you know, I must be careful to make sure that I don't create an echo chamber for myself. But at the same time, I don't need to hear about how my cousin thinks that he's an alien like our president is an alien who was sent from another planet and is being controlled by China? Which was something he posted.

Interviewer: I have no words.

Participant: Yeah, I was like, "I think you've been in Alaska too long my guy."

Interviewer: Okay, tell me about a time you heard about such content in the news.

Participant: So yeah, and like, you know, the news has unfortunately become very biased. I mean, it always has been. They have an agenda, they have a bias, like they're going to, and I saw it was it. I heard a TickTok the other day, and it sounded like seven different local news stations were owned by the same parent company. And they all had theirs up Hope the news hosts are saying the same thing about this big world political issue. Same phrasing, same everything, and I think that's really its detrimental. It's kind of scary. I know there's not a whole lot you can do about it other than be aware. And there's no real way to be aware if you don't think there's a problem in the first place.

Interviewer: Yeah,

Participant: So, it's interesting to see the progression of news and social media and the way that they are kind of going hand in hand because on one hand, you know, the political spectrum, news stations will use the other sides, like, "look how crazy they are. Obviously, we were right because look how upset they are. And then, of course, they would have done the exact same thing." And that's a lot like, "Oh, you liberals, you do this because it's in the news or, you know, Black Lives Matter." There were protests. Of course, there were. They were rights, of course. There were Everything is being taken away from them, but they don't talk about the reasoning behind it. They talk about what they've seen and what is being shown.

Interviewer: Yeah,

Participant: And because that's what serves to fill that 24-hour news cycle, that's what serves to validate and confirm the biases and beliefs of their demographic so that they can retain those. And it's unfortunately a very capitalist-driven and money-driven market. The news is which

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means that the people who own it and want to make money know that the way to make money is to confirm their demographics and beliefs and play to them. It doesn't necessarily mean that the news must be real or that it must be relevant or that the content be presented in a good way. It just means that it must be a good business. That's how they can survive.

Interviewer: Alright, if there are any social media sites that you think are trapped or untrustworthy, what do you think makes them untrustworthy?

Participant: I think there are a lot. You said social media sites or news sites?

Interviewer: Social media sites.

Participant: Facebook is a place to share opinions. I mean, honestly, all social media, for the most part, is to share opinions. It is social media that is news media. People can share things like particles and mechanist stuff, which is helpful. I've come across a lot of cool things about it. Through things that have been shared, I've learned a lot about myself. But they've been shared by people. And even like the social media managers behind these new stations, and even like intellectual institutions like the Smithsonian. They are running a business, and their job is to get clicks. Their job is to increase the number of likes on the page. So, what is it? Clickbait and all that kind of stuff like that. That's always going to be a thing. And it is. I think Facebook is probably the most frustrating because everything there goes unchecked. Instagram must like, post a picture or you can't really post a link in it. So, it makes it difficult to share that kind of stuff. Twitter, everyone just kind of, it's all just chaos and you just happened to find some interesting stuff in the chaos. You can get shut down easily because a lot of those Sub-Reedits have really strict rules and mods and that sort of thing. But Facebook is kind of just... well, some of them do.

Interviewer: Oh...

Participant: If you like, I'm on Outhistory, which is all about historical stuff. And someone posted a link. And Amado immediately took it down. It was like, "this is not from a scholarly resource. This has not been verified. It has not been peer reviewed." But on Facebook, it's kind of the Wild West.

Interviewer: Wow

Participant: It's just, uh, "uncle-so-and-so thinks that the birds are actually robots because he's never seen a baby pigeon and he's found articles on system board that say that," and it's all like, you know, people who think that infographics and just regular graphics are news.

Participant: I'll be honest that's where I first found out about, like, the Ukraine crisis. It's where I found out about, you know, news that way, and it's just easy to be like, "oh, cool." That's what happened. The end. Uh, and you don't really go any further into it.

Interviewer: Alright, so the next question is, "Tell me about your experience in finding conspiracy theories." If you want to go deeper into that, you can, but I know that you gave a detailed explanation of that earlier.

Participant: I think they're hilarious. Uh one. When I was doing all the dating apps and stuff last year, one of the first questions I would ask was: what is a conspiracy theory that you think is true? Because man, I was able to weed out so many people and it created an interesting discussion. I will weed out to a lot of people just because, like, why would you possibly think that's true? and I think everyone has, like, conspiracy theories. They could be fun, right? Like I don't want to discredit the idea that Bigfoot exists. Sure, why not? But also, I don't think that birds are robots just because I've never seen a baby pigeon. So, it's like stuff like that. They can be very interesting. This stuff with QAnon is even more fascinating because, you know, with a little bit of research, you can find it started on 4 Chan, which is the king of trolls in terms of

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websites. It's well documented that the guy just kind of liked something and just made it up to fuck with people to see if he could.

Interviewer: Really.

Participant: Yeah, like it's, uh, he posted about it. And like, they keep getting the dates of the interaction wrong. Or like we know when things are going to be turned around again. And it's fascinating and, like, very depressing that an entire interaction in our nation's capital happened. Because of people's belief in things, they can't prove. Humans love to look for patterns and connections. That's one of the cool things that makes us developmentally different from animals: we love looking for patterns and connections. They don't necessarily mean anything. There's the whole correlation versus causation thing.

Interviewer: Yeah,

Participant: You know, everyone in my family has freckles. It doesn't mean that we were, you know, shit on the by the gods or whatever you want to call it. It just means we have weird melanin-like genetics. Uh, like, there's the whole thing. People love to assign reason, and that feeling that I can get started on that, but I think that's why religion is very important and popular.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Participant: Or some that you just can't understand currently, I don't know how black holes work. I trust that they do, though. If you want to think (and we want to think that God is flushing the toilet), fine, whatever. But it answers and so conspiracy theories go the same way. They answer questions. Concerns or fears, for example. And they give information as evidence. For instance, coincidental evidence rather than actual evidence. "Well, have you ever seen, you know, superman and Clark Kent together? I don't think so." So, they're the same person on the inside.

Interviewer: So again, this is another question that you've pretty much answered earlier, it says "If applicable, please describe a time when you shared content you felt was true, but later learned it was not so."

Participant: So, like the one I mentioned earlier, and even you know, Facebook does that thing where it's like, "Up here are your posts from like this day in the past, however long you've been a member of Facebook." I got Facebook as a teenager and I know that once I have shared, it's really cringey, so I will go back through those and be like, "oh, that's not true. That's not true. I don't need to put that out there." So, I will kind of do that. And it's like it is a bit of a kick in the gut because I consider myself an intelligent person. I like to think that I'm analytical, so it is a bit of a kick in the gut where you're like, "I'm self-conscious that I shared something that was untrue." And so, like, I'm some paragon of information, you know, and without question, but it's more than that. There's some false information, like fake news. It's easy to just see that, like, it's very easy to see that they have comic sans on their website. Like obviously, that's not legit, but.

Interviewer: Yes

Participant: But there are some that are very good, and it makes you kind of question things because you don't ever know what we could be using. I mean, you know, my Google Photos that could be part of something more, and we would have no idea because it was presented in a certain way.

Interviewer: Yeah

Participant: I think everyone has I think it's just a matter of how you react once you find out or are told. That is the part that I'm interested in.

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Interviewer: If applicable, please describe a time when you shared things that you knew were not true.

Participant: I don't think I can think of anything that comes to mind. Well, a friend of mine needs to get out of a really bad situation. And so, she made a Gofundme, and she didn't want her information to be public. So, we put it under a fake name and then I just shared it as, "hey, this person that I go to school with really needs help." It's on those topics that I believe the lie balances out. Uh, but I, you know.

Interviewer: Where the means justify the ends.

Participant: Exactly. And like, it's kind of hard to present that, but it's also known that it's not hurting anyone. I think that's the reason I was OK with it was because it wasn't hurting anyone.

Interviewer: Alright, tell me about a time when a search engine like Google or Yahoo seemed to give you what it thought you were looking for based on what you had already searched.

Participant: Uhm, or based on, like, previous history?

Interviewer: Yeah, so it's kind of creating an algorithm for you.

Participant: OK, so my senior thesis when I was in school. The detriments of daycare. So, it was about, you know, why the way that they set up our setup now is detrimental in terms of, like, getting kids prepared. And then when the time came two years later, it was time to put my son in daycare. Uh, because I'm a single parent? Uh, it came. It gave me. It basically answered the exact questions that I had. So, you know, when I looked at class size was a big issue.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Participant: When I start doing things like today, here's the overview. The first thing that almost every single little preview had was that class size looks like this. This is more of a class ratio; I think it was. It was like a two-year difference, about 2 1/2 years. It was impressive. Oh, and then when I got married, Four-years ago, and everything after that had to do with weddings. Everything. Uh, I could type in shoes, just shoes, and it would be like to what? Wedding shoes? Shoes for your wedding.

Interviewer: Uh, yeah.

Participant: Here's what kind of shoes you should wear to your wedding. Uh, so it's like there's no point in denying that they are connected and they're listening, like everything is tracked and algorithm and all that kind of stuff. But there's no point in trying to, you know, ignore that. And it is kind of funny, though.

Interviewer: So, this next question, it's kind of similar. Describe a time when you noticed that search results seemed somehow tailored to you. Have you seen this discussed anywhere?

Participant: I haven't really seen it on the news. Because I don't have any. I think I live a boring life, as you know. It's interesting. So, my partner just got a job at a marketing firm. And their job is if you go to them. You know, McDonald's at 8:00 AM every day. They're going to send you marketing for McDonald's breakfasts. So, it's been interesting to see the back end of things now that he's working there, and I haven't really noticed anything on the news, but like, my son loved animals. And we watch a lot of animal documentaries together. And I got it. So, like we watched a lot of, was it? Nat Geo Wild is like the kids' version of the net. Oh, and I got an ad the other day on Facebook for the Nat Geo Wild magazine. And I've only ever searched for Nat Geo Wild on YouTube. But I got an ad for it on Facebook.

Interviewer: Oh, that's freaky.

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Participant: And it could be a coincidence, it absolutely could be. I have the right aged kid, we talk about animals a lot, but that specific one was what I got recommended.

Interviewer: Alright, so how do you decide what personal information you will provide to social media companies like YouTube, Google, or any other site?

Participant: Like I said, it's kind of like, I think you are kind of fooling yourself if you think that they don't already have all the information in some capacity just because they're connected now. A lot of people don't realize that Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter are now owned by the same people.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Participant: YouTube is owned by Google now. So, I don't really have an issue with it, like I know I have the little Alexa doodads, and I know a lot of people don't like them. Like I just said, they just say "I don't feel comfortable with that in my home," like my phones are already listening, like everything that I look for on the computer is being tracked, so I don't really have an issue with it. I do try to be mindful of certain things, like I have an email that I use for bullshit and then I have like an email I use for actual things I want to receive, and so I do try and keep those things separate. But other than that, I think it's better to be proactive instead of just shutting everything down and being secretive. Like there are some things where I'm like, "oh, this seems kind of sketchy, but I want the free T shirt, so I'll use my nickname or my maiden name."

Interviewer: Oh, okay.

Participant: Something that isn't super connected to me, and then if I get a lot of junk mail regarding that name or a lot of ads using that nickname, I'm like, "oh, ok, it's because of that then."

Interviewer: I had a project when I was in middle school. I think I was in 7th grade, and we had to research flights to go on a trip somewhere, and I used a fake name and I still to this day get emails with that fake name from these travel websites. And I've tried like I go to the bottom and I'm like "don't send me anymore emails," but I still get them like several times a week.

Participant: I clicked unsubscribed. Yep. I was trying to make a budget for getting a different job, and I knew that my insurance would change, so I made the mistake of Googling insurance quotes because I really didn't know where to start. I am still getting multiple telemarketing calls a day and that was a year ago.

Interviewer: Alright, so tell me the ways that you try to protect your personal information online. What do you think others around you do?

Participant: So, like my dad, He doesn't update his profile picture or anything like that. I think the one he has now is probably 11 years ago. He puts things like a fake birthday on there and all that kind of stuff. And he thinks he's, like, super protected. I don't really do that for myself; I just don't post a lot about my personal life. Mostly because I don't care what other people's opinions are about my social life, and I don't know I went through a bad, messy divorce and an abusive relationship and all that, and it was just nobody's fucking business. But with my son, who is 2 and a half, I only share pictures of his face, let's say, like for Instagram, my Instagram is shut down. I have to know who you are, and you have to send a follow request. And uh, if I haven't known you or seen you face to face in, like, a year or so, I'm not adding you. Or if I do add you, I put you on like the limited list where you only see the things that I want you to see. So, pictures on my son's face and mentions of his name are only for, like the people that I know would have verified their intentions.

Interviewer: Uh-huh

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Participant: Uh, if I'm just posting to like people that I went to college with and I want to casually keep up with, like on my stories where everyone can see, it's usually the back of his head or I'll put a little sticker over his face. Oh, and I just refer to him as like little dude or something. And when I'm commenting on a parenting page, I just call him my son, or I just say my toddler. I don't say his birthday. I don't say his name. I don't say anything like that. Or like someone asked what daycare he was going to, and I was like "just one near us". And some of that is because of my background with like my abusive family, and abusive ex. And some of this just because I know that there are a lot of shitty people out there and I don't want to make their job any easier if they want to be shitty with my family.

Interviewer: well, you pretty much already answered this, but what have you heard about protecting your identity or personal information on the news or your friends or your family?

Participant: So, the stuff on the news usually, especially if it's like an actual news station, is usually pretty targeted towards Boomers. I saw a lady the other day who's like "I've tried my password three times trying to log into this website and it's not working. Here's my password can anyone else try it?", and I'm just like, "girl? Are you? You just posted it to the local news station in the comment section. Why?" I think it's probably because they didn't grow up with the Internet. They didn't grow up with social media. They're not on places like Reddit, where there's a whole subreddit for like ex-cons giving advice to people.

Interviewer: Really?

Participant: Yeah, they're like, "hey, I used to rob houses, and this is what I would look for that might make you a target." So, they just don't have experience with this stuff, and that's fine! All they know is that they use Facebook to talk with their friends so of course they wouldn't mind telling your friends. They just don't understand that grandma, your page is wide open. So, I don't really see a lot of stuff on the news that is solid information, other than like the stuff that we kind of grew up with already, like, you know, don't use basic, predictable stuff for your passwords. But then my Ex was in IT, and he taught me some things about how to use private browsing and that kind of stuff. And how it's not really private, and what kind of passwords to use, and don't use password manager, and this other stuff. But like I've had a couple friends who are like, "Oh yeah, I just never set a password for that, I just use my fingerprint". And I am just like, "okay. They're your fingerprints. It's not that unique and it's pretty easy to get." So, I don't know because I am a little bit paranoid. I'm way too into true crime, so that's probably part of it. But the most that I've heard specifically on the news, is targeted more towards Boomers. Things like, "Did you know that if you put all your nude pictures on Dropbox, people can get them because it's just a website? Or that there are programs that if you just put in a CD, it'll get all of your passwords?" And they're just mind blown that technology can work that way! So, I think that part of it is just like they didn't grow up with it. It's not their bread and butter. You can hand a tablet to most 3-year old's now and they can set up all the settings and do it all for you, and my 50-year-old mother still can't do that.

Interviewer: Alright, so this next part is all about algorithms. How have you responded to how Internet companies tried to customize or control what you see on their platform like in Google searches? And what have you heard others discuss about this either personally, or on the news, or anything like that?

Participant: I know it freaks a lot of people out, which is understandable, I get that it. I think it's kind of entertaining, mostly because some of the targeted stuff that I get is... weird. like I got and ad the other day for a 5-foot, 400-pound panda statue that was like \$4000. it was a garden statue, it was holding a little bird bath, but it was this massive like 5 1/2-foot Panda. And I was like, "what have I searched that has led you to recommend this to me?" So, I don't know why I find that entertaining, but I do. It's kind of freaky. And sometimes Google will have an option to ask why am I seeing this ad, and I do usually click those if I if it's like really has nothing to do with me. I try not to click ads, but at the same time it's just kind of a part of life. Now there are things that are ads that you don't know are ads. It's just not worth the extra effort for me in a lot of ways, but if it's not relevant, I don't have any problem be like "hey, this isn't relevant to me, or

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please stop showing me this.” Facebook ones (ads) are very interesting because it's always like “I'm a Leo kind of girl and I do this” and it's something like a shirt that has everything about you. Those are kind of freaky because I'm like, "I'm a Leo from Florida, and I do this," and I like football and it just lists all of your interests. But then again, I've actually seen people wearing those shirts. So obviously, it's for somebody. So, with algorithms, people are just kind of freaked out by them, which I get, I think because I really don't just search wildly, so usually if I'm getting recommended stuff, it tends to be stuff that's relevant to what I've been looking for anyway. So, I don't mind it as it can be very helpful. Like I've got a bunch of really cool essay recommendations, but it is kind of weird to be like, "how do they know that I'm looking for toys for my son and to teach him about what trees are which?" Then again, I got his puzzle regarding, that from an ad.

Interviewer: Alright, so if you were to explain to your friends or family how false information spreads and how it can be found on the Internet/how to avoid it on the Internet, what would you say?

Participant: It depends on my audience. If it's just my friends, well, there's one friend in particular, and she's a very sweet and naive person who thinks the best about the world. I just have to explain that there are people whose goals are not always to be truthful. If you have to look at what their motives are, you look at their job, and ask, “is it their company?” If so, their job is to make money. They make money by reporting on the news, but their job is to still make money. So, I have talked to her about how you know if a site is legit or not. She was worried about all the computers shutting down and getting a virus for some reason. And I was like, "why do you think this?" And she sent me this link, and it had no sources. It was just like a it was a BlogSpot. And I was like, "well, this is a person's opinion, and you can tell because it's a blog. A legit source won't be a BlogSpot." And so like I kind of explained it that way. But using technology terms with people who are a little bit older, I either don't bother. Or like in the case of my dad, he shared something, and I had to be like, "hey, Dad, not only is this hurtful, but it's actually detrimental to what you're trying to achieve. If I think what you're trying to explain is blank. If that's the case, here are some sites that I found that may be more relevant, but because of this, this and this, this is not the best source to use or share." So I usually kind of do a little bit more hand holding up with the older generation or I don't bother. Because sometimes they're not looking for information, they're looking for validation. Or sometimes they're just looking to start shit. Like one person, one person tagged me in their post in there like, “I know that you'll hate this because you're a feminist.” And I was like, "well, I hate it because I'm a person who cares about other people, but I don't know why you tagged me in this." And they're like “oh, I just knew it would get you worked up.” Like what a great person you are! Thank you. I appreciate you getting me worked up on a Tuesday morning. Oh my God. I think that is why I said something like, “well, I have other things to do today. But you know, have a great one.” I don't know, people are weird, but yeah, that's what I would do, as long as I don't think they're just trying to stir the pot up, I'll usually try and be helpful and use like my teacher voice. I'd be like, “wow, I love that you did research on that. Like, this is so interesting," you know? "But let's look at this source instead.” It works, but half the time they still get grumpy. But you know, it at least makes me feel like I've done my due diligence that they're not sharing stuff about how they're putting magnets in the gas now.

Interviewer: Alright, So what do you think determines what is seen online or how it's spread? How do you think this works? Who benefits? Who do you think made this system and what do you think controls the information online?

Participant: Money. Money is the biggest thing. I'm not a huge fan of the way that capitalism is structured, like I talked about earlier. You know, the news stations are owned by a company. Their job is to make money. Their job is not to be truthful. Their job is to continue getting views, continue getting clicks. And they're gonna do that with whatever means necessary. I think that that's part of the reason why newspapers are kind of going away, is because they don't make money, but they do produce the interaction when they do tell the news. It's very frustrating. But at the same time, I think that it's a whole system that has every part of our lives connected. So, it's not really something you can dismantle overnight. It's just something you can kind of have to

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be mindful of how you navigate it. But yeah, I would say, like, money is the biggest thing. So, the biggest thing and then in terms of how things like how information is given to certain people, demographics have it pretty spot on. Like, you know, if you want to look at a really great example of algorithms being nearly spot on, TikTok is on it. They got that I am Bi, living in the South, the mom of the toddler, a divorcee from an abusive relationship, someone with ADHD within maybe a month of using it. That being said, it's been very helpful because I'm able to find content that's relevant to me, it's been very validating. That's how I use that though. So, you know, algorithms are great for researchers. They look at how we use their site, how much we use their site, when, where, etc. And then they look at like just the basics like age, area, etc. They know that people in the South, they're gonna target differently than people out West. It's just smart business, which that's what news is. News is still a business.

Interviewer: Alright, so the Internet is full of stories that divide people about things like Coronavirus, the Capitol Riots, Stop the Steal, Antifa, Black Lives Matter, Climate Change, QAnon and the political parties. If you were to decide, how would you like schools or the news to talk about what controls the Internet and what is seen?

Participant: I would say the best way to be more preemptive is to explain that emotions are always going to get a really strong reaction. I mean look at those ASPCA commercials that we grew up with. Like if you tell me, "wow, animals really need a home," I'd be like, "damn, you're right." If you show it to me in this commercial with, you know, all this, like Sarah McLachlan music, all these sad puppies. I'm gonna go adopt 7, and I'm going to give away all my money. I gave my entire allowance for years to ASPCA because of those commercials. I think if you explain it like "hey, their job is to make money, and they know that they're going to get a really good response, or really good interaction, with emotions." So, like they get money, if there's over a certain amount of comments. So if it could also be a really divisive clickbait thing, that's meant to create a lot of comments. If they tell you, "hey, discuss it below," that's going to create revenue for them, and create free marketing. So, I think if you just explain that if you look at the motives, I think that says a lot about someone. It's really like someone as an entity, like institution and someone just as a person. But yeah, I think talking about if you look at their motives and be like if someone gives you the facts, you're allowed to double check them. And I think that's one of the great things about the Internet is you don't have to take things at face value. I was told by a teacher that Left-handed people are so rare that no one acknowledges them. I have to start using my right hand for everything because no one wants to hire a left-handed person. Uh. And I was like, "OK, cool because I was like 10." So, it's like, oh, that makes sense to you. Are you my authority figure? And I have no way or reason to question you. So, I love that that's what the Internet can be used for in terms of good things. It's like, "hey, I have the ability to go verify and validate that information. So, I think that's really cool." Now the Internet is the social media, like the Internet is now a way to communicate and the way that I grew up it was Internet as a way to get information. I think if there's a way to kind of combine those and just inform how you communicate or inform how you are communicated to and just be smart about it, I think that would make a big difference.

Interviewer: So, if you happen to see stories about Stop the Steal and the Capitol Riot, what made you think those protesters were there? Why do you think some of them were dressed in costumes like hunters and trappers with animal pelts, Norse tattoos, Roman soldiers, Cowboys for Trump, all that stuff? And what does this mean for stories about voter fraud and voting rights?

Participant: People want to belong, like that what drives humans? Like, that's what clubs are for. That's why we wear shirts so that we can identify each other. And that goes back way, way, way back in human history. Until it makes sense, these people have outlandish views, at least in my opinion, that are in their mind, being attacked. And being questioned, which means that they are being questioned because they can't see that those are two different things. Uh, there's a lot of, "if you don't believe that, then you don't love me" and it was like "well, no, you just make it really hard to love you sometimes." So I think part of it is it makes them feel better. There are a lot of people that are like, "We are patriots, just like our founding fathers, because our founding fathers created, you know, riff raff and like tie into this." They, like everyone, want to feel

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important. Everyone wants to feel special. Everyone wants to feel like they're part of history. That's the side that they won't take their stand on. That's what they do. They're gonna go all out for it because, dressing up makes people feel like there's a reason that there's like war paint and that kind of stuff. Historically, it's to help with the bravado and the competence and it makes you more tuned to like the cause. So I think that's part of it, is they, they really do see themselves as like, "oh, we're then Vikings of America." So first of all, the Vikings would hate you. Speaking of which, no, you're not. It's a way to pull from other places, like from cowboys. Like the cowboy culture doesn't want to be looked at like that. Why were they that way? Or who actually were Cowboys? And they think that there is, like the wild, Wild West and they're the rebels and that they're like everyone wants to be rattled. They are like, "the entire US was based on people rebelling," so it makes him feel good. It makes them feel like patriots. It makes them feel like what they're doing is for the best because everyone is against them and they know what's right. Meanwhile, you just making an ass out of yourself.

Interviewer: The next question is pretty much the same thing if you happen to hear about the QAnon movement, what do you think they think about themselves versus what others say about them? Then why do you think there's so many conflicting stories and what does it mean to you?

Participant: I think the most interesting part of QAnon is at least like online in my friend group and like family and that kind of stuff. He's to people who choose to be a part of it is like very vocally. Uh, it's people who are a little bit on the fringes, maybe don't have a lot going on for them at the moment, which sounds mean. They don't tend to be the most intelligent people. The very intelligent people that I know in my life had nothing to do with QAnon, from both sides of the political spectrum. The people who are very conservative and who are usually the ones who are with QAnon and they see their conservative way of life being challenged by what I would consider social growth, like gay marriage, trans rights, etc. You know, helping refugees like survive. They see that as attacks to their belief and therefore an attack to them. They like the idea of feeling like they're a part of a group.

And it's gonna fight that there are people out there who are validating them in their echo chamber and that they can and are smarter than everyone else. It's a way for them to feel like they have control over a situation that has nothing to do with them and therefore they have no control over. But then they don't like, which I like. I get it like if I were in the other shoes, I would want something to be like, "surely there's something to hold onto." Like when Trump got elected, not everyone is like this. Surely the majority did not vote this way and you do look for someone to be like, "OK, well, maybe it was, maybe it was that they're corrupt," like obviously that's what happened. Like you wanna find something to make it be like the world can't be this bad and the people are going to think the world is this bad on both sides because of different reasons. They just took it a little far because they validated them on a global scale. And the more people will try to fight them, the more that they felt they were correct. I mean, I think that makes you a bit of a dumbass, but whatever.

Interviewer: Alright, if you happen to be following this story on the coronavirus once since, do you make of the direct information out there about whether people should get vaccinated or not, or wear masks or not? And why do you think there's so many conflicting stories? What do you think causes these different stories and what does it mean to you?

Participant: So a lot of the pushback, I am very pro-VAX, always will be. I think a lot of the pushback is people don't like being told what to do. Uh, which I get. And it's limiting their freedoms. I think it is not natural for a lot of people to care about people, especially faceless general population. Uh, I have seen my cousin who had cancer, had like a stem cell transplant and he's very immunocompromised, was anti-VAX and he was like "I used to want every being required to get a vaccination. Like this is not democratic at all, it's illegal." And I was like "there are multiple Supreme Court case precedents that say otherwise because it's for the good of the people. Just because it doesn't benefit you directly," which it did for him, but even if it doesn't benefit you directly. Sometimes it's just good for everyone and that's OK. And they don't like being a part of that because it also included people they don't want to be associated with, which I get, and I don't get but like, you know, I don't want to be associated with Republicans, and I'm in the South. They, you know, they think CDC is a part of the government and therefore they're

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going to question it and especially during the Trump administration and the election, it was very like they were told again and again and again by the new cycles, "you can't trust what is being told. You can only trust what comes from person A, B, and C. And those people were being attacked. And so, they have to go underground. You can't. You can't trust mainstream media and so. These bonkers out white people are Putting out this information to show dissent and to get likes and clicks and all that kind of fun stuff. And it's a way, again for people who my partner made a joke about it, like the LIVESTRONG bracelets. Everyone had those. No one knew what it was really about. I don't think anyone donated to any other causes like half the people did and I don't think any of the people who were on the bracelets could tell you what it was actually for, however. It was visible. We all saw it. We saw you also support this thing. I support this thing. We are supporting it together. We are connected. I think it's kind of like anti-VAX or just like the people who are really, really against it. But like oh, you're also against it, I'm against it. Therefore, we're both right. Uh. And like, look at you. Look at me. We are both doing the same thing. So, and it's like. Everyone wants to belong. I think that's what it all comes back to you. It's just that right now. It's there's a very divisive part of our history and so people want to belong. There's one side or two side and there's no real middle ground, especially in something like vaccination. You can't be halfway pregnant. You are vaccinated or not pregnant or not. So yeah, so there's a lot of, like, black and white issues that people are drawing lines on right now, which means that you can't really be halfway so that there's a lot of like us vs. them. And there's stuff like Fox News who's very like us vs. them. And even having any post is very us vs. them. Which goes back to the end of time as well. So, there's always going to be something up, but I especially don't know, I feel like, I am not arrogant enough to think that I know more than someone who specializes. Uh, it personally like if it was one part like I'm sure there's multiple scholarly articles saying that the, you know that the, vaccine is bad, but that's when you do research or not. Just one article. Uh, so I yeah, I'm just not arrogant enough to think that I know better than someone whose job it is. I have a specialty job. If I go to someone else in my, like, job. And I'm like, "hey, we need to do XY and Z," I would hope that they would trust me because it is my job to know all this information. Uh, and I think it's just a basic kind of respect thing. For those who don't, like accepting or don't like being a part of a better whole or want to feel special. That's an easy way to go about it.

Interviewer: Alright, so if you happen to be following the coverage on the House Select Committee to investigate the Capitol Riot, what since do you make of how Republicans and Democrats disagree over the scope and purpose of the committee?

Participant: I haven't been as up on top of the information coming out as I would like to be, but from what I've seen, if the Republicans are kind of pulling that emotional ploy, "Oh, but patriots! They were doing what they thought was right. Patriots, you know, it's all about, the American good and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah." And it kind of seems like Democrats are also going for the emotional route, which, if that's how it works, I get why they're going that way. I tend to agree with the Democratic side on this point, just know they're being freaking terrorists. Uh. Their point was to cause terror. Ah, it was planned. It was like, well thought out. And they had help from the inside. There is proof. Right. People have admitted it, and therefore they are terrorists and. Like it's a very educated emotional ploy. But because they're both using emotional ploys, that kind of cancel each other out, it's like a very strange chess match up. I don't think it's going to get anywhere because there's not enough. I hate the idea that like in order to be supported as a blank party member like Republican, you have to agree with the other Republicans. Because it just creates the echo chamber, and that's really not the point of having a representative. And I hate that they are paid so much because that means it becomes a business aspect and they want to get hires. They can continue their pay. Uh, and I think it's just, yeah, it creates a giant echo chamber up: "Well, I'm going to agree with the Republican Party because I want to continue being supported by Republicans and I need this to get through. So, I'm going to say 'yes' to this so they say 'yes' to this kind of thing. And I was just at this big boys club and I'm not a huge fan of that." It's kind of sad to see how transparent the manipulation is and how they're presenting information and still see people supporting that. Wow, I've lost a lot of respect for family members because I'm like, "oh, wow, you actually think that, you don't see how obvious it is?" It still happens.

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Interviewer: Alright, if you happen to see stories about Black Lives Matter protests and Antifa, what do you make of the protests after George Floyd was killed? Why do you think some people burned buildings or destroy property? Why do you think protesters denounced the police? Where did you learn this information? What does it mean to you?

Participant: So, the first time I saw it, I was like, you know, "Destroying buildings is not the best way to go about it, like it doesn't, help your message, basically like it's not good branding." But the more I read the more anecdotal information about people who are like, "We are sick and tired as a black, as a Black community, of things being so blatant", like a video of someone being murdered and then people still questioning it up when you think about it that way, like they're just fed up. Yeah. At that point I saw one person they interviewed. May have been up in Minnesota, and they're like, what is the difference? I can protest peacefully. And no one will hear, no one will notice. Or I can break into this Target and take some stuff, and people will take notice. And it doesn't work like "you know, they're gonna hate us either way. So why wouldn't I?" I'm tired. I'm tired of everything being against us. I'm tired of being defeated for no reason other than the fact that I was born a certain color. And I think it's very easy to say as a white person, "racism isn't a thing anymore. We got rid of that. You know, there were the race riots and there was, you know, the immigration population. There's no more reason." It's like, it's very easy to say that. And there's a very systemic part of racism that is easy to ignore when you're not affected by it. And again, an echo chamber kind of comes back into play and, if you are beaten down so many times, you're gonna stop being the squeaky wheel. And so, of course it hasn't. Like, they're going to keep to themselves and like they just deal with that. And I hate that. And I also get that there's a, you know, a point where you just can't take it anymore. Someone who compared it to like an abusive relationship and coming from that like, "oh, I definitely know how that is." You take and you take, and you take, and after a little while you just can't take anymore. You snap. I get that. So, at first, I was really upset by it. Sounds like you're really not helping. And it doesn't pull in a lot of ways. Like the older generation is just not going to get it. But I think the younger generation gets it more. Never would have gotten that perspective. So, I think social media is very good for getting perspective. Circling back to like the riots. It's not great overall like globally. I do think it was necessary. I think it's understandable. And if it comes softly, Target there. They'll be just fine. I see no problem. But the mom-and-pop shops I do have more frustration with. I don't love the police. I hate the way it's set up. I hate the way that, there is no training necessary and like there's this idea that, like the police, is the authority on the matter. No, their job is to enforce, not to decide. And I think they are given way too much authority and I am all about, I mean that the phrasing is terrible, but like defund the police, I think we need to reallocate a lot of the funds, they don't need to handle health checkups unless there is present danger and there are plenty of examples of police carrying non-lethal weapons and other countries that work great. And I just think where America is a little bit more going crazy. Uh, I have loved ones. I think they're very fun. I will never want something to happen in my home. Uh, so I think defunding the police is not the right phrasing. But I do think reallocating a lot of those funds and responsibilities is a really good idea. And this was a very good wake up call for people who are ready to see it as a wakeup call. Otherwise, people see it as, "oh, look, they're doing that thing that we all say they do." So, for some it was very eye opening and for some it was very validating in their own beliefs. And then it was divisive.

Interviewer: Alright, this is about contributions to the Internet. So, what content do you post online? What type of content do you try to make visible for others to see and what is the type of content you keep private? I know you've kinda already answered this.

Participant: Oh yeah, uh, so when it comes to like non personal stuff because like I talked about the personal stuff and like, why didn't I share when it comes to non-personal stuff, I tend to share things that are educational. Like there's a lot of things I talked about, you know, coming from an abusive relationship. It's things like that, or resources for that or, "hey, you may not recognize this as abuse because it's such a commonplace, but it is." And here's how to deal with it. Or like parenting stuff. So, I tend to share stuff that is like educational or informative. Or things that I think will help benefit other people. Uh, maybe I'm trying too here. I can just look at what I've posted recently. Let's see. So, the last thing I posted was about how the College Board, the company who does like certification for schools. Uh, they have said that any kind of anti-critical

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race information, if that's being banned from schools, that school will lose their AP status. Yes, which is huge, but then it makes me happy. Uh, I think it's really cool because I'm in education, my background is in education. I want people who are in education, and I think it's huge that there is a company who makes like, their job is to make money. I think it's really big that the IT company is taking a personal stand like that be a political stand because it's so uncommon, but it's so necessary.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Participant: And so that was one last thing they posted. And then the other thing was if you call a group of Bay Area students, set up a number and you can choose a number one through 10. And it will give you like a pick me up message. So, it's just really sweet. Yeah, I thought that was cool. And then, like, things that I feel validated or frustrated by like this is in Finland, newborn babies are sent home with the box containing 60 essential items and then the box can be used as a crib because that's what they do. They prioritize. One is health and Children's Health. Uh, and I made some pithy caption about if they wanted to support women and children, they would, including our own government because. Uh, as a newly single parent, it is extremely frustrating realizing how little women and children are supported. Uh by the government, but how regulated are they at the same time? So, I tend to try and be informative. And I recognize that I'm biased and I'll usually put something in the caption if I recognize that's bias and be like, "hey, this is biased," I put a non-bias like only other side option in the comment's kind of thing.

Interviewer: So, can you remember a time where you were careful about what you chose to like online because of how it might affect the visibility of other people's contribution and content in your social media feed?

Participant: So I'm very aware of when I comment on things, people can come back though. It's like linked to my page. Up until during the election, I got heated. I was stuck at home with the baby. I had all these frustrations that I couldn't do the things I wanted to do. And I felt like the world was crumbling around me. And so, I got a little bit more active on social media and like talking. Uh, but. It uh became very clear to me someone was like, "is this your home and last name?" and they were able to Google me. So, after that I was very mindful about it, not attacking, personally, not saying anything like that. I'm just trying to be informative and, "hey, this was not helpful" or "hey, I think you're meaning this, but it's coming off disrespectfully. OK?" I'm trying to be helpful, informative, etc. I tried to in a nice way to call people out. "It kind of seems like you're coming across this way. I don't think that's why you're meaning to come across," which forces them. You'll be like. "No, I actually do think that" and I'm like "OK, good. I just wanted to clarify." So, I'm careful about what I post and what I pick up and I have no problem liking something. Like I have had people reach out like "Oh my God, I saw that you shared someone, that you liked so and so, is that actually how you feel?" It creates discussion, and if nothing else, it helps me weed-out the people who I don't need in my life. Like that person. But you know, she's like, "well, I just don't agree. And I'm really disappointed in you." I was like, "that's fine. I don't, you know, you were my teacher in first grade. I really don't care."

Interviewer: Please tell me about a time when you tried to influence or change the content of what you have seen on YouTube, Google or other social media results by searching differently.

Participant: So, when I found out that I was pregnant, I was still in my abusive relationship. And, I just started searching for abuse. I would like, search for like abuse resources or divorce resources and then click on any of the links just so I could get that in my algorithm and I knew that if I did, over time when I was ready to leave my situation, I could have more resources at my disposal. And then there have been other times where, like, there's a story that'll get shared and you can do like the little dots. And like, I don't want to see stories like this anymore. Uh, I'm a bleeding heart, so any kind of like animal stories like there was this dog that was set on fire and shot 7 times like I'm an emotional mess and I am not in a place where I can hear this right now because I want to drive to Delaware and go get this dog. So, I have done that. That's more for like my own mental health. I do recognize that that's really what it is like, it's just like I must be

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careful about echo chamber. And being self-aware of what you surround yourself with, but if it's better for your mental health then do that.

Interviewer: Alright, so when you are unsatisfied with Internet search results, how do you adjust your search to change the results?

Participant: Uh, it depends on what my frustration is. I was trying to find legal precedents about, like I said, I have a lot of tattoos and piercings and I intend to get more, but I work in academia and like the floor above me is the provost of the university and floor above him is the president. And everyone around me is very educated and doesn't have any tattoos or piercings, so I was looking for legal precedents about like, "hey, I wanna make sure that like my tattoos covered in case I need to do anything." And so, I did that, and I wasn't really finding anything, it was finding results based on like I was going to get fired because I have this, but it will often be like a private university. Like my stuff and I was able to find a version of what I needed. I think if there's a smart way to do research and a tweet like I was taught in school how to use it because that's when the Internet was pretty new, and you had like ask Jeeves and that's about it. And I think I don't know if that's still being taught in school, but I know that there's, like, intelligent ways to utilize advanced searches.

Interviewer: Alright, so this is about source criticism. How do you decide if an online source of information is reliable or credible?

Participant: I mean, there's basic stuff that we were taught in school. Is it .org., edu., com., gov? And then I usually go to the bottom and look and if I'm like, "oh, this one seems a little sketchy," it'll usually say that one time like this is this page is sponsored by Republicans of America, like, ah, there we go. There we go.

Interviewer: Oh, yeah.

Participant: Uhm, another fun way is if you're kind of worried about it, go to the contact section and if you look at the person's name or whatever, it'll be contact so and so at birdsarefake.edu or, you know dot Yahoo, like cuckoo, cuckoo.

Interviewer: Uh. Or you can look at the biggest thing that always looked like we talked about earlier motive like at any point on this page, are they selling something? Uh, are they recommending a product? Are they recommending themselves? Are they recommending like or? How transparent are they about that?

Participant: Uh, because if they're going to tell me, like, "you know what your baby is being radiated with nuclear energy by that blanket," you could buy hours instead, though, like, oh, I don't trust you because your motive is not pure. Even more of it is not information. Your motive is for me to use you instead.

Interviewer: So, can you tell me about a time when you double checked information online to verify it was credible? And then some sub questions off of this or what made you suspicious? What steps did you take to see if the information was correct and what did your findings make you feel about the website?

Participant: Oh, I do that a lot. So, let's see. I was looking for one about, I was looking up during my divorce process or was looking at what I needed to do. What I need to say, what I needed to save, how I needed to do things to make sure that basically I get more than what I need through the divorce. I'm not about taking advantage of people, but I also know that my ex was able to hire a good lawyer and I was not, so I had to do a lot of research myself. There's a lot of places out there that are like, "yeah, we'll totally help." They will give you this information and it's unclear. Like is this legitimate? Like there was one and the website seemed great, had a bunch of stuff that was actually quite helpful. And I still use one of their tips now, but at the bottom it talked about how it was a branch off of a local Catholic Church. It talks about how to deal with an abusive Co-parent. I was like, "that's really helpful."

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Interviewer: Yeah.

Participant: I said during a separation, "OK, cool." And then at the end it was like reminding that separation doesn't mean that you're going to split your family up and destroy it. And I was like, "what are you talking about? Like abusive people here in a separation? Why would you not?" Make sense? And then I saw the bottom. It was a branch off of the Catholic Church. I was kind of conflicted. And you kind of just have to take it. Well, I did get information from it. This is helpful. It's with greatness or I'm going to take this information and translate it to my needs. It's uh, yeah. You must be, like, aware of it. But I honestly wouldn't have known if I hadn't scrolled all the way to the bottom. I would never have. And I liked it when I got to the point where it's like, "hey, it doesn't mean that you must break up your family." I did feel bad. Like, their emotional ploy worked out. Like, man, is that what I'm doing is I'm like splitting up a family? And then I read who it and I was like, "you know, I'm keeping my kids safe. I'm good."

Interviewer: Can you tell me about a time that your friends or family distrusted a website or information on a website? Did they double check the information from a different source to verify it was credible?

Participant: I had a family member literally post something on Facebook. I was like, "I'm not sure about the site, but the information is very interesting." Like that. That's what they posted along with the link. Yeah, it was like, "hey, you said you weren't sure about the site." Uh, I did some research. I took a screenshot of the bottom and like you know, posted it. If you ever want to be a little sassy about how you do things, you can type in, "let me Google that for you" and then do a search result, and then it'll literally show an animation of you typing something into Google for them and then showing the results. So sometimes I'll do that.

Interviewer: That's so funny.

Participant: It's like it's just a little bit like it's literally just a Google search away. Do you have you have a phone? Right. This is the whole-ass Internet. All you have to do is put in effort. Yeah. So, it depends on how stupid they are, but in that case it was like well, "since you were sure I'll Google it for you." And granted, he's in his late 60s, like whatever, but still.

Interviewer: Alright, how do you think the media should cover stories about fake news or different formation? Should the media do more to teach people how to verify the credibility of information?

Participant: I don't, I don't trust the news to teach me how to listen to the news or teach others to listen to the news because yeah, they're going to make it work in their favor. I think that's a thing that needs to happen in schools. Like I said, my background is in developmental education. And so I think, like, there are classes now that's like using the Internet within the sphere of education K-through-12, and I think especially for like younger kids and that kind of stuff, you need to make sure that they understand what it looks like, what a safe website looks like. How do I verify it? Something is safe from data mining and information mining or identity mining. So I wouldn't trust new stations to do it because they're gonna come, they're going to make themselves out to be the good guys. That's their job. That's just good press. Everyone is going to do that, so I wouldn't trust news to do it. I do think it needs to be done. I also think that the majority of people who are sharing fake information are older. So, I don't know if there's a great way to reach them since they're not in school anymore. I think the best way is to teach the younger generation to question what the older generations are saying. Always question, always verify for yourself. It does not hurt basically to question things. So I think that's really important. So I don't trust the news to teach it. I do think it needs to be taught, though.

Interviewer: Alright, so the term fake news seems to be everywhere right now. What are your thoughts on it? You know, what is it? Where is it? Who does it target? Who's vulnerable? What does it mean for democracy? Is it a problem? And what are the politics of it?

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Participant: I think fake news is a casual term. It depends on how it's used. But there is a lot of fake news out there, like just subjectively. If anyone can make your website these days, but I think "fake news" is used a lot by the right to do as a dismissal. Uhm, and like, it's a very like, because in this world of where anyone can make a website, it is hard to know who to trust, especially if you didn't grow up with the Internet. So, I think it's very easy to like automatically distrust except for, like, you know, the these select few.

Interviewer: Uh, what is fake news?

Participant: So the politicians are using those emotional ploys via the Internet via the news a lot more and you hear politicians using that phrasing because they don't want you to trust, they're like, "You should trust me, not them." And both sides are going to say that. So I think it's a very intelligent move on their part to use the idea of fake news, because the best part is it can't be proven. You can't prove that news is real. You can't prove that news is fake. All you can do is take, I think, because of blank, blank and blank. And there is some more, you know, hard evidence, like no doubt. You know, Barack Obama is not an alien or a lizard with skin. That's just common sense. And there's not really evidence. And like you know, everything can be doctored nowadays. And so like, there's no way to prove, you can't prove a negative. So, it's actually quite brilliant as a political move to say, "Oh no, they're fake news, they're manipulating you." Yeah, so, but damn this person told me something that I don't know. I'm gonna trust them now. It's entertaining, it's very problematic, but then there's not a whole lot you can do to combat it because of the way the system is set up. I think that answered a little of some questions.

Interviewer: Please offer some examples of where you're seen fake news, who are the people who publish it? What are they trying to get from it, and what should be done? I know that you answered this like four times already.

Participant: You're good. I know how these things are. So it's, I would say it's mostly on Facebook. It tends to target 40-45 and older, I would say, like within that Boomer generation. It also targets the children of die-hard conservatives. Uh, which is really depressing, really. Like my cousin Allen in Alaska. He's, let's see my calendar, he's like 25 or 26. Uhm, he has this view and I'll tell him like "you were raised, you were raised with the same kind of information that I was in terms of like verifying information, but his parents are teaching him one thing. It's something that you're around every day. Like if you're around a Spanish speaker every single day, you're gonna pick up Spanish. If you're around a QAnon person all the time, you're gonna pick up on that kind of stuff. And so it is mostly Boomers, and it is usually on Facebook, and it's usually pretty funny.

Interviewer: Alright, so we are pretty much done. Is there anything else you would like to share regarding anything in this interview?

Participant: I know that I'm biased, but like I said, I know where I'm at. I'm on the political spectrum. I don't try to be, but also fully recognize I am biased. I think this class sounds awesome and your questions were fantastic.

Interviewer: Thank you.

Participant: Yeah, of course. Let me know if you have any other. Like if you have any questions or anything like that, I'm available via email, Facebook Messenger, etc.

Interviewer: OK, just a few more questions before we go regarding demographics and things like that. So, what is today's date?

Participant: It is March 7th, 2022.

Interviewer: Alright. And what is your state of residence?

Participant: Georgia.

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Interviewer: OK. What is your age?

Participant: 29, there we go.

Interviewer: I always have to think too. I'm like, I know it comes around every year and I get asked all the time, but I can never remember.

Participant: Well, specially like with the quarantine and having like a young kid like, I really haven't done anything with my birthday, so it's kind of hard to acknowledge it.

Interviewer: Yeah, alright. And what is your gender?

Participant: Female.

Interviewer: And what is your race?

Participant: White.

Interviewer: OK. And what is your highest level of education completed?

Participant: Completed? It is going to be bachelors.